

ADVENTURES

IN WESTERN NEW YORK HISTORY



The
Beginnings
of
Buffalo Industry

BY ROBERT HOLDER



BUFFALO AND ERIE COUNTY
HISTORICAL SOCIETY

VOLUME V



Hopkin's Mill — Williamsville, New York.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

THE BEGINNINGS OF BUFFALO INDUSTRY

By Robert Holder

WHERE once burned the Indian council fires, the smoke of factories now colors the air. Where once plank walks and cobblestones supported men and wagons, the streets of the frontier settlement of Buffalo are now overlaid with cement. Started before 1800 as a cluster of settlers' cabins, Buffalo became the last stop on the Erie Canal by 1825. It was a chartered city by the year 1832. Pioneering men changed a countryside inhabited by Indians to an area that has grown into one of the great industrial communities in the nation.

It would be impossible to include even a fair sampling of the enterprises important in Buffalo's industrial beginning. It is hoped that those which have been chosen have captured some of the spirit of the early business and industrial pioneers in the Queen City of the Great Lakes.

Buffalo Removes Its First Obstacle

Before the energies of Judge Samuel Wilkeson succeeded in constructing a harbor for Buffalo, no boat larger than a canoe could navigate Buffalo Creek. As a further obstacle, a sandbar lay across the entrance to Lake Erie. The sandbar was removed after the State of New York agreed to lend the newly founded Buffalo Harbor Company \$12,000 to carry out the project.

Harbor dredging today is done with huge machines mounted on a large, flat-bottomed boat. But in 1819 dredging was performed by dragging wooden scrapers through the sand and gravel that had to be removed. The power for working the scrapers was supplied by men on the deck of a flat boat.

The Need For Power

The opening of the Erie Canal increased the need for greater mill power in order to produce products which could be shipped on the canal. To meet this need, the Buffalo Hydraulic Association was formed. This project involved damming the water of Little Buffalo Creek and constructing a canal. The excavating of the canal took two years, 1826 to 1828. The canal started at what is now Harlem Road in West Seneca. It wound irregularly toward Buffalo and entered a millpond west of Fillmore Avenue.

Since the project was entirely in the Buffalo Creek Indian Reservation, the Indians had free use of the canal if they traveled by canoe.

Others who used the canal paid a toll charge for hauling grain, live stock, produce, lumber, or logs.

The canal became a serious health problem as Buffalo expanded. The slaughter houses and tanneries along its banks used the canal to dispose of waste materials. Many times the canal was red with the bloody discharges from the packing plants.

Legal action to remedy this problem started in 1851. The canal was finally covered in the 1880's. The increased use of steam power helped to outmode the Hydraulic Canal.

Little Buffalo Creek was then known as the Commercial Slip. Today it is remembered only when one locates the bridge of the D. L. and W. (Lackawanna) Railroad which crosses its outlet at the foot of Commercial Street. This is the place where boats once left for Canada's Crystal Beach.

The Coming of City Water

The Jubilee Water Works Company opened for business on July 4, 1826. The company supplied water through logs to Black Rock. The water, drawn from Jubilee Springs, was later supplied to Buffalo in 1829 and was transported through logs laid down Main Street to the canal basin. An historical marker places the original site on the north side of Delaware Avenue, a few hundred feet from Gates Circle near Millard Fillmore Hospital.

Buffalo in 1836

So rapid was the march of improvements in Buffalo, that by the year 1836 there were 52 miles of finished road in the city. On some of the prominent streets the sewerage system was well-developed.

Rev. George W. Hosmer, in a paper read before the Historical Society in 1880, referred to the city as follows:

So came the Buffalo of 1836. We can see the old signs now along the docks and upon Main Street. Joy and Webster, Sheldon Thompson and Co., Smith and Macy, Wilkeson and Beals, Townsend and Coit, Hollister Brothers, Oliver Forward, Reuben B. Heacock, Judge Love, Dr. Johnson, Pratt and Company, William Williams, S. N. Callender, N. P. Sprague, General Potter, Albert H. Tracy, Millard Fillmore, N. K. Hall, Ira A. Blossom, H. K. Smith, Barker, Hawley and Sill . . . I have always thought it was a remarkable company of men here in Buffalo in that first period of the city . . . And there were here in Buffalo, forty years ago, a company of women superior as the men. The new life quickened them and gave spirit and force to the culture and habits they brought with them from older communities.



Jubilee Water Works, Delaware Avenue at Auburn.

Lumber Trade Develops

As late as 1825 there was no saw or planing mill listed in the local records. There were carpenters and joiners, and two cabinetmaking shops. Perhaps the lumber came from sawmills which were established about 1800 up the Scajaquada and Ellicott Creeks.

It was not until the 1850's that Buffalo developed a large lumber trade. Cargoes from Southern Ontario and Michigan were transferred at Buffalo to the canal boats which moved the lumber on to Albany.

About 1857 a number of Buffalo enterprisers tried to float log rafts from Saginaw, Michigan to Buffalo. The undertaking was given up after a number of rafts were lost.

John S. Noyes bought the hulk of a ship that had once been a floating palace, and in 1861 he turned it into a barge to haul lumber. Soon after this venture a great number of barges, carrying whatever could be taken aboard, appeared on Lake Erie.

In 1860 about 111,000,000 feet of lumber came to Buffalo by lake barge, with none shipped by rail. By 1890 rail shipments were 375,000,000 feet, and lake imports were 287,000,000 feet. This indicated that the railroads were replacing the barges as the popular carrier of lumber for the Queen City.

The Enterprising Goodyears

The name of Goodyear looms large in the history of lumber on the Niagara Frontier. The enterprises of Frank H. and Charles W. Goodyear brought them personal profit and benefitted the community in many ways.

While other lumber dealers passed by good forests that were far from water transportation, Frank H. Goodyear invested heavily in isolated forest holdings. He built his own sawmills. Then he promptly connected them with shipping centers, by laying out his own railroads



Factory, North Tonawanda, New York.

to reach the busy mills. In 1885 he bought 13,000 acres of woodland in Potter County, Pennsylvania. The railroad he built for this venture later became part of the Buffalo and Susquehanna Railroad which gave Buffalo easy access to coal as well as to timber.

In 1887 Frank entered into partnership with his brother, Charles, and by 1902 the Goodyear Lumber Company was incorporated. Typical of the advanced thinking of the Goodyears was the building of a sawmill of steel — the first of its kind. The output of this mill was expected to exceed that of any other sawmill in the world at that time.

The Goodyear brothers' interests included the Buffalo and Susquehanna Coal and Coke Company, the Buffalo and Susquehanna Steamship Company, the Great Southern Lumber Company, and the Marine National Bank of Buffalo, of which both brothers were directors.

Furniture and Billard Table Manufacturing

One would expect Buffalo to have numerous furniture manufacturers to take care of the home needs of the expanding population. The Cutler Desk Company was established in 1824 as a small cabinetmaking shop. By 1884 it employed 100 men and sold its furniture nationally. This factory burned down three times, but it was rebuilt after each fire and business continued as usual.

The Brunswick-Balke-Collender Company in the 1880's had a factory at 597 Main Street in which it manufactured billiard tables. This was a popular item of production in Buffalo in the early days. At least five individuals and companies made this equipment. It is recorded that the first billiard table made in New York State, west of New York City, was made in Buffalo in 1825.

Shipyard Industry Booms

The sharp smell of pitch, the sight of snake-like coils of rope, and the never-ending sound of hammers and wood-scrapers were the signs of the booming shipyard industry along Buffalo Creek. Keels for lake sailboats and steamers were laid at Buffalo and Black Rock. There was great demand by the settlers for transportation from the end of the Erie Canal to points farther west. In the year 1833 alone, 50,000 passengers were transported westward across Lake Erie from Buffalo.

To keep the cost of passage down, the boat builders constructed shelves and tables in the steerage. Stoves were set up for cooking so that the emigrants could prepare and serve their own meals on board ship.

A total of 30 steamers, characterized by their billowing white clouds of wood smoke, were built in Buffalo between the years of 1818 and 1857. Starting with the steamer *Walk-in-the-Water*, built in 1818, nine more ships were constructed at Black Rock by the year 1843 when the *Union* was launched.

The first tragic lake-steamer explosion happened at Buffalo when the *Peacock* burst her boiler while tied up at the wharf in 1830. When the water in her boiler ran low, a careless and inexperienced engineer turned a valve which gushed in a stream of cold water. The boiler blew up, and fifteen men were killed.

Steamer construction in Buffalo hit a mad pace in the 1840's and 1850's. During these years business men and tourists were leaving for Detroit and Chicago to join the large number of immigrants going west. Each year found the ships faster, larger, and more luxurious. Even the railroads built special steamers to make connections with their lines at the other end of the lakes. But too many ships were built, even for the rapidly increasing lake traffic. In 1857 the shipowners went bankrupt because of over expansion. Much of the lake passenger and freight business was drained off by the new railroads. Handsome rosewood-finished ships, now too fancy for the regular lake trade, were docked and used for less elegant purposes. The shipping business simply could not continue to operate without a profit.

Later ships were built specifically for transporting coal and grain between Buffalo and other lake cities. In the 1870's a fleet of schooners was constructed for hauling cargoes between Buffalo and Chicago and Milwaukee.

Flour Milling Starts Slowly

There was no milling industry in pioneer Buffalo — just the usual grist mills out in the country. But then the immigrants who had poured into the West began to seed the prairies with golden wheat. Before too



Buffalo, 1850, Showing Dart Elevator.

many years, the grain trade on the Great Lakes expanded considerably. In 1829 Buffalo handled 7,975 bushels of flour and wheat. By 1830, just one year later, the combined shipments were 181,029 bushels. By the time the first grain elevator was put up in 1842, the flour and grain imports had soared to 3 million bushels!

Joseph Dart was watching grain being unloaded at the Buffalo wharves one day in 1841. Slowly and laboriously the grain was cupped into buckets. It was then carried on the backs of strong Irish dock workers into the warehouses to be weighed and recorded. Not more than 2,000

bushels a day could be moved out of a ship's hold when this age-old method was used.

Joseph remembered the invention of a pioneer American miller, Oliver Evans, who had originated and patented a conveyor belt for use in grain milling. Not a hand touched the milled flour as it was transported on a leather belt revolving on pulleys from the millstones to the hopper box. Dart wondered why this device couldn't be adapted to the unloading and storing of grain at the jammed Buffalo piers.

Amid the jeers of doubtful onlookers, Dart put up a building on Buffalo Creek. He constructed a large warehouse and installed a perpendicular conveyor belt fitted with buckets that could elevate the grain from the ship's hold to the storage house. This elevator was powered with a steam engine. He was then ready to transfer grain from the lake carriers to either the canal boats or to his storage bins.

The innovation was an immediate success. The schooner, *John S. Skinner*, came in from Milan, Ohio and docked in the early afternoon. She was unloaded by Dart's system, took on a ballast of salt, and was out of the harbor before dark. She was able to make a return trip to Milan and transfer her second cargo at Buffalo before other ships, being emptied by the hand method, had finished unloading their first cargoes. The grain trade, with this automatic aid, was to advance Buffalo to the position of the leading grain center in America.

As late as 1881 wheat was ground on burr millstones. In that year the George Urban Milling Company introduced corrugated steel rollers for the milling of flour.



Buffalo was a natural place to make cereal, because grain could be so easily obtained by ship carriers. Alexander Hornby, the originator of the rolled-oat breakfast cereal, brought the H-O Company to Buffalo in 1895. He then sold his rights for manufacturing his breakfast food to Edward Ellsworth.

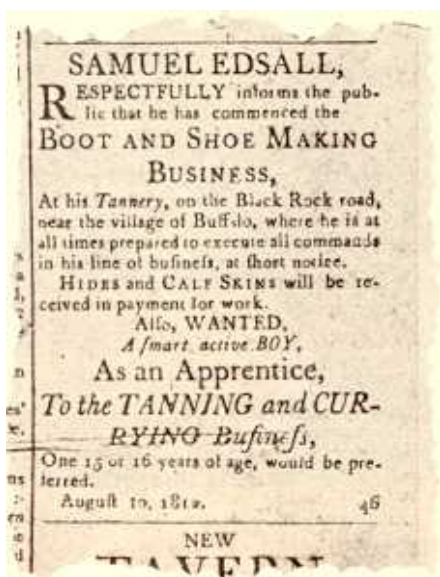
Tanning — An Important Early Industry

The presence of easily available hemlock in the bordering forests made tanning one of the most important early Buffalo industries. The site of the first tannery, established in 1812 by Samuel Edsall, was located at what is now the corner of Niagara and Mohawk Streets. This building was used by the British General Riall as his temporary headquarters during the burning of Buffalo in 1813.

A sizeable tannery was started by George Palmer in 1828. He came to the area with the rather large sum of \$15,000 to begin his business and bought land near Seneca Street. The water power from the newly-constructed Hydraulic Canal, had attracted him to this rather unlikely location. The marketplace for the finished leather that he made was on Main Street. This was the same George Palmer who later was to become President of the State Line Railroad, President of the Marine Bank, and one of the incorporators of the Union Iron Works.

The Rumsey name stands out in Buffalo's early leather industry. Aaron Rumsey, whose family was familiar with leather manufacturing for generations, started business locally in 1834. After building up a sizeable leather business, Aaron died in 1864. His two sons, Bronson and Dexter Rumsey, further advanced the tanning business. By 1884 their Buffalo plant and the Holland, New York plant turned out 200,000 hides a year. By 1904, when the firm was taken over by the United States Leather Company, it was classified as one of the leading industries of that type.

Jacob F. Schoellkopf immigrated to Buffalo from Germany. In the year 1834 he opened a modest leather store on Mohawk Street. Jacob



Excerpt from Buffalo Gazette, 1812.

started with the purchase of a small tannery in what is now Hamburg, New York — called White's Corners in those days. He established a sheepskin tannery in Buffalo in 1846 and kept enlarging his operations until he eventually owned tanneries in Milwaukee, Chicago, and other cities. At the time of his death, in the year 1899, every variety of leather which could be made from sheepskin was manufactured in the Schoellkopf plants. Sales agencies in South America, England, and France were maintained by the enterprising tanners.

Weed and Company, originating in 1818, and Beals, McCarthy, and Rodgers both wholesaled leather goods such as belting. Belting manufacturing became important when industries added more machines.

Large supplies of belts were needed to harness power for turning machine wheels.

The first shoe factory in the city of Buffalo was established in 1853. This was the Forbush and Brown plant at 103 Main Street. John Blocher and Nelson W. Blocher operated plants at 64 Exchange Street, starting in 1863, and employed several hundred workers. As late as 1923 there were twelve shoe factories in Buffalo. Today there are no shoe manufacturers in the city.

Livestock Industry Grows

It would be hard to say just when the livestock business began in Buffalo. But in 1852, according to one Buffalo historian, H. Perry Smith:

It was no uncommon sight in those days to see a drove of hogs, cattle, and sheep over a mile in length, reaching from the foot of Main Street out towards the stock pens. Many fine 'porkers' found their way, from those droves, under the barns or into the yards of residents along the road and were never claimed by the owners. A shortage of a few head in every drove was, in those days, not an unusual thing.

About 1855 the New York Central and the New York and Erie Rail-

road companies built pens and chutes for loading hog and cattle cars. Before that, the stock was unloaded on long planks set up against the cars.

A seventeen-year-old German immigrant, Christian Klinck arrived in Buffalo in the 1850's. He had only enough money to pay his railway fare to Buffalo, but he immediately gained work as a butcher and earned \$6 a week. By 1868, through thrifty saving, he was able to enter the meatpacking business and founded the Christian Klinck Packing Company. His South Buffalo enterprise on Depot Street eventually covered twenty-five acres and comprised twenty-five buildings. Today, Klinck & Schaller, Inc., under the presidency of Christian Klinck's grandson, is the continuation of this pioneer Buffalo firm.

The Jacob Dold Packing Company was started in 1860. At that time, Jacob Dold, Sr. had a small butchering establishment on Abbott Road. Two years later he set up a packing plant at the Elk Street Market. By 1872 he was doing business at a location in East Buffalo. An annual payroll of \$3,000,000 covering 2000 workers, marked the progress of the company by 1920.

In comparing pioneer meatpacking with the meat processing of more modern times, Jacob Dold, president of the company, said the following in the Buffalo Year Book of 1920:

There was then none of the modern efficiency which is now known all over the world, as being one of the most important features in every up-to-date packing house. . . . As the industry . . . grew, new methods . . . of curing and chilling products gradually changed the great waste of edible meats which now goes into scores of tempting and appetizing food products.

Other important packing houses were the Danahy Packing Company, Klinck Brothers, Louis Fuhrmann, Laux and Edbauer, and the New England Dressed Meat and Wool Company.

Besides being a livestock center, ranking highest in sheep handling, Buffalo was also the second greatest horse market in the country. Two large commission dealers in horses were the Bailey Horse Company, located at 23-25 Newell Street and the Crandall Horse Company at 949 William Street.

Pioneer Spaulding's Community Contributions

Elbridge Gerry Spaulding, whose grandfather fought at the Battle of Bunker Hill, came to Buffalo in 1834 as a young lawyer. He is a good example of the type of pioneer Buffalonian who helped advance the industrial progress of the Niagara Frontier. Banks, such as the Farmers' and Mechanics' Bank which Spaulding brought to Buffalo, are an essential factor in the industrialization of an area. The Buffalo

Gas Company, organized in 1848 through his support, and the general sewerage system for the city which Spaulding introduced were also necessary before the industrial life of Buffalo could progress.

The active part he played in enlarging canal and harbor facilities in Buffalo and in financing railroads to service industry promoted the city's growth. As financier, mayor of the city, and Congressman, his activities constantly promoted the well-being of Buffalo's industry.

George W. Tift — Pioneer Capitalist

The name of George W. Tift is recorded in Buffalo histories as a monument to enterprise and character seldom matched in pioneer tales. Not content with the yoke of oxen and a horse that were to be his own when George came of age, he left the family farm.

One of his first enterprises was to buy five acres of land in Orleans County in Eastern New York which he cleared, selling the wood at a handsome profit. When he realized that he could hire men to chop the timber, reaping a profit on the labor of each man, he bought a larger tract and engaged more woodchoppers.

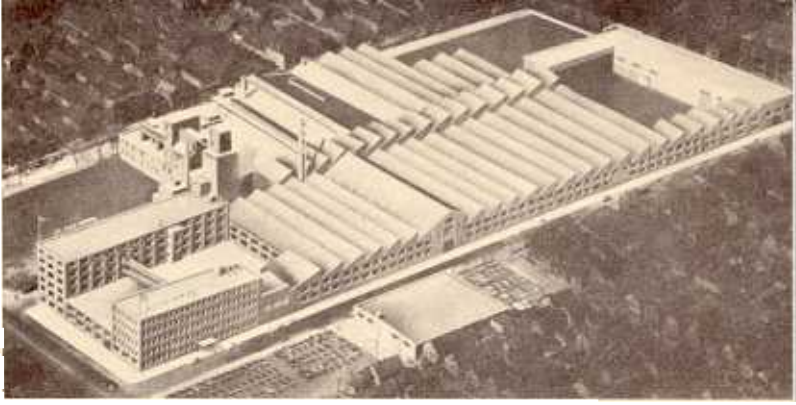
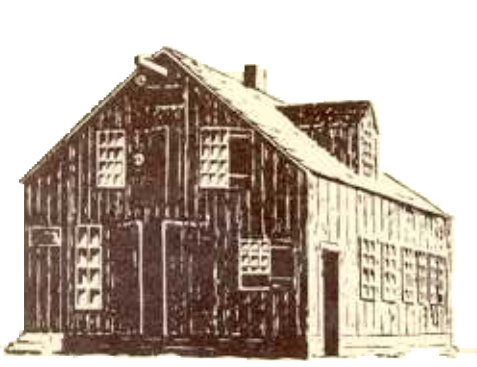
At the age of 21 he had accumulated \$1,200. To this, George added a thousand dollars which was due him from his father's estate. He was ready to begin a new business venture. The year 1841 saw many men moving west, so George Tift traveled to Michigan where he bought grain for shipment to the east. While doing business in Michigan, he came to know Buffalo shippers and eventually moved to their city.

When George Tift came to Buffalo in 1842, he formed a partnership and entered the milling business with Dean Richmond — a member of a prominent Buffalo family. A year later Tift set up a transportation system called the Troy and Michigan Six-day Line, so named because it was not in operation on Sunday. His fortunes advanced, and in 1844 he was in the produce and commission business. The purchase of other mills further increased his commercial holdings.

Tift helped to establish the International Bank of Buffalo and was made its first president in 1854. He was also interested in the Buffalo Steam Engine Company in which he invested \$100,000. The panic of 1857 hit him heavily, but not enough to stop his business successes.

In 1858 he was elected president of the New York, Lake Erie and Western Railroad which connected towns between Buffalo and Corning, New York.

Next, he turned his attention to improving some of his Buffalo real estate holdings. In the year 1863 he erected 74 houses, a hotel — the Tift House, and an elevator. Tift's foresight caused him to buy a 600-acre tract of land in the southern portion of Buffalo, generally



Buffalo Forge Company, corner Mortimer and Broadway, 1883 and today.

known then as the Tift Farm. This was later broken up into residential and industrial areas which are, today, worth millions of dollars.

Tift's interests were far-reaching. He was the first to experiment with winter wheat, despite the laughter of area residents. He invested much of his money in the Pennsylvania coal fields and experimented with smelting the Lake Superior iron ore with mineral coal. His land interests reached half-way across the country; at one time he owned a 5000-acre farm in Shelby County, Iowa, completely stocked and cultivated. He could be selected as a representative of Buffalo's industrialists whose importance became national.

He spent the latter years of his life managing The George W. Tift, Sons and Company, successors to his original Buffalo Engine Works. Over 400 persons were on the payroll of this major manufacturer of boilers and stationary engines. He also erected a group of stores at the corner of Washington and Mohawk Streets and opened a furniture business there.

Buffalo and the Petroleum Industry

Oil for lighting and lubrication in early Buffalo was a product manufactured from lard and other fats. Petroleum, at that time, could be purchased only in drug stores — Seneca Oil it was called locally and was used medicinally. Tradition has it that, back in 1820, an old man on a white horse with two gallon kegs strapped to the saddle would come to Buffalo each spring. He sold petroleum which he had sopped up from "Oil Creek" by the ingenious process of laying a wool blanket on the surface of the spring from which gushed oil and water.

When oil was discovered at Titusville, Pennsylvania in 1859, Buffalo businessmen were among the first to put their money into the development of this new industry. Although much of Buffalo's capital poured into the early petroleum ventures, it was not until 1873 that any attempt was made to refine crude oil in Buffalo. Joseph D. Dudley started the Empire Oil Works, located on the Ohio Basin. The Standard Oil Company took over the Dudley plant in 1878. The Atlas Works, built by the Kalbfleisch Sons, was taken over by the Standard Oil Company in 1892.

Charles B. Matthews established the Buffalo Lubricating Oil Company in 1881 but sold it in 1887 to outside capitalists. A year later he organized a new company, the Buffalo Refining Company, but this time he had his refining done in Pennsylvania. Two other refineries, the Niagara and the Phoenix, both built in 1881 on the Tifft Farm, failed.

The Solar Oil Works were established in 1880 by Buffalo and Titusville interests. Three years later the Tidewater Pipe Line Company took over the Solar Oil Works, and this organization was then bought by Standard Oil to add to its fabulous oil empire. By 1892 the Standard Oil Company controlled most of the oil business in Buffalo.

Railroads Reach Out From Buffalo

The nine-day trip from New York to Buffalo on the Erie Canal satisfied most Buffalonians. However, a number of residents looked ahead to railroad transportation and did their best to foster it.

In a Buffalo Journal dated September 6, 1831, this announcement appeared:

Railroad . . . At a numerous and respectable meeting of the citizens of Buffalo, held at the Eagle Tavern on the 6th of September, for the purpose of taking into consideration the subject of railroad communication between this place and the Hudson River, Bela D. Coe was called to the chair, and James Stryker was appointed secretary.

On April 14, 1832, two railroad companies were incorporated. One, called the Buffalo and Erie Railroad, was to run from Buffalo through Chatauqua County to the Pennsylvania line. The other, the Aurora and Buffalo Railroad, was to connect Buffalo with the area that is now called East Aurora. The money panic of 1837 caused these roads to fail before even a foot of track had been laid.

A horse-powered street railway was opened in 1834, joining Black Rock with Buffalo. But the first railroad on the Frontier to be operated by steam was the Buffalo and Niagara Falls Railroad which was built in 1836.

The Buffalo and Attica Railroad which was completed in 1843 joined the Queen City — through Syracuse, Utica, and Schenectady — to Albany. In 1851, when the Hudson River Road was opened to Albany, and the New York and Erie Railroad pushed its way through to Dunkirk, there were two direct rail routes between Lake Erie and New York City.

One of the noted railway pioneers was William Wallace. Prior to the time of his death, in 1887, Wallace had something to do with seven out of the nine different railroads built. In a typical pioneer way he was at different times a promotor, engineer, superintendent, railway

surveyor, and civic publicizer of the many railroads in which he was interested. His last project was a railroad, running from Buffalo to Washington, which later became a branch of the present Pennsylvania Railroad.

Buffalo's Street Railways

Buffalo had a street railway system in which the cars were drawn by horses. Although this method of transportation was established as early as 1834, it was not until the year 1860 that lines were constructed to serve residents who had built homes out Main Street and along Niagara Street towards Black Rock. An outstanding figure in streetcar transportation was Stephen Van Rensselaer Watson who — with G. R. Wilson, Charles T. Coit, and Andrew J. Rich — incorporated the Buffalo Street Railway Company in 1860.

The first horse cars were 12 feet long. They were mounted on four-wheeled trucks, and each car cost about \$700. The rails, made in ten-foot sections and bolted together to prevent spreading, were made of cast iron overlaid in wood.

By 1863 Buffalo boasted streetcar lines on its best streets. There was a total of 11 miles of double track and 60 passenger cars. But the street railways were poorly patronized. Many citizens preferred to walk rather than pay five cents for the questionable privilege of riding the *horse cars*.



Buffalo Street Railway, Main at North Division, 1888.

On March 11, 1888, the horse car had a rival — the electric trolley. Despite the protests of many Buffalonians who feared electrocution from falling trolley lines, the first overhead wires were strung from Cold Spring to Delaware Park on July 20, 1889. The last horse car ran on November 19, 1894. After that time, all streetcars were electrically powered. Two years later the Buffalo trolley system tapped into the Niagara Power supply and became one of the first users of this electric energy in Buffalo.

Early Ironworkers

The first ironworker to come to Buffalo was David Reese who was sent by the U.S. Government in 1803 to be blacksmith for the Indian settlement. In 1808 he bought a lot and built a shop at the corner of Washington and Seneca Streets to serve the growing village as well as the Seneca Reservation. This was one of the two wooden buildings not burned when the British attacked Buffalo in 1813.

Plow-irons and small castings were made in Buffalo by Edward Root as early as 1826. By 1864 there were twenty foundries and machine shops which filled orders for iron products.

The first rolling mill, a factory where metal is rolled into sheets and bars, was constructed in Buffalo in 1846 by a group of men from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. The business began as the Buffalo Iron and Nail Works. Some years later, Pratt and Company — iron and hardware dealers — took over the company. The manufacturing plant changed hands several times in the next twenty years, but it continued to employ from 500 to 800 men. This enterprise helped to build up a section of Buffalo that otherwise might not have expanded.

The Pratt and Letchworth Company was a pioneer in the open-hearth steel process in Buffalo. This company, formed in 1850 and composed of Samuel F. Pratt, Pascal Paoli Pratt, and William Pryor Letchworth, turned out steel castings as early as 1888.

Pascal Paoli Pratt was only in his early forties when he rose to local fame as one of Buffalo's leading captains of industry. William Pryor Letchworth sold his interest in the company to his brother, Josiah Letchworth, in 1873 and devoted the rest of his days to public affairs.

This company, nationally famous for its saddlery hardware, founded the Buffalo Malleable Iron Works on Tonawanda Street in 1860. As the iron works expanded, they moved into the manufacture of products for the driving wheels and frames of some of the largest United States and foreign locomotives.

Iron ore smelting started in Buffalo about 1860. Its growth was assisted by the opening of the Erie Canal and by railroad communications with the coal fields of Pennsylvania. The smelting industry was



Interior Pratt & Company Iron Works, 1855.

further aided by the discovery of unlimited iron ore deposits in Northern Michigan. The Civil War also stimulated iron and steel production by the use of a new blast furnace, built in 1860, the first on the Niagara Frontier.

Four men, Messers Palmer, Wadsworth, Warren, and Thompson, joined their manufacturing efforts in the Union Iron Works. They signed the contracts of agreement in 1862 to consolidate their blast furnaces and to add a rolling mill. But in 1871 the project failed. A new Union Iron Company was organized, but the financial panic of 1873 brought depression to the country and ruin to the company. It was not until 1890 that the plant was re-opened. Frank B. Baird, after rebuilding the plant, started business under the name of Buffalo Furnace Company.

In 1878, William F. Wendt organized the Buffalo Forge Company to manufacture a portable blacksmith forge. In the beginning, parts were produced by outside jobbers and were assembled and shipped by the Buffalo Forge as ordered. In 1880 the company moved from its original location at the corner of Washington and Perry Streets to its present site at Mortimer and Broadway. As the business expanded, it absorbed the plants of the George L. Squier Manufacturing Company — in 1902 — and the Buffalo Steam Pump Company in 1904.

Buffalo was soon to enter the Age of Steel. In 1900, the Lackawanna Iron and Steel Company of Scranton, Pennsylvania started construction of a huge mill in Buffalo. At first the company planned a plant to produce 800,000 tons a year. However, before completion of this mill, it was apparent that the need would be greater and it was enlarged to produce 1¼ million tons of steel a year. The current capacity of the Lackawanna plant of Bethlehem Steel exceeds 6 million ingot tons. The first steel rolled in this new Buffalo mill in 1903. This was a year after the discovery of rich iron deposits in Minnesota's Mesabi

range. Economical lake transportation of ore to Buffalo helped change the city's prime source of income from commerce to manufacturing.

Buffalo's First Wallpaper Factory

Martin H. Birge, a storekeeper from Middlebury, Vermont, stopped at Buffalo on his way to Chicago. Birge must have been impressed with the business opportunities that the growing settlement offered. Three days after his arrival in Buffalo, he headed for New York City to buy merchandise, and in October opened a shop in Buffalo.

Twelve years later, in 1846, Birge moved his business to 174 Main Street and decided to devote his interests completely to selling wallpaper. In spite of a depression and the Civil War, the Birge enterprise continued to grow. In 1878 — Martin Birge was 72 years old at the time — manufacturing of wallpaper was started. The business was then listed as M. H. Birge and Sons, Manufacturers. Six weeks before the death of Martin Birge in 1900, the company became a corporation with George K. Birge, Martin's son, as president. As The Birge Company, Inc., they are still a vital part of the Buffalo industrial picture. It is interesting to note that from 1908 to 1916 George Birge was also president of the Buffalo-located Pierce-Arrow Motor Car Company.

Metal Products and Machinery Manufacturers

Pioneer Buffalo had manufacturers of edge tools and flour milling machinery. It had foundries and machine shops which served local and



Works of Farrar & Trefts, on Perry Street.



Main Street and Erie R.R. — Cement Works, 1874.

Western New York needs. Threshing machinery was manufactured in 1840 by the Buffalo Pitts Company after twin brothers, John A. and Hiram Pitts, patented a combination threshing and separating machine. The company later expanded its manufacturing to include railroad locomotives, freight cars, and special cars for transporting and spreading crushed stone.

The Buffalo Scale Company which was organized in 1860 was soon shipping scales to all parts of the world. In the 1880's the company made an average of 19,000 scales a year. A large number of them were bought by the United States Government as standard equipment. As the company grew, it specialized in heavy-type weighers such as railway truck, motor truck, wagon, hopper, and platform scales.

There were a number of bridge manufacturers in Buffalo in the past. In 1881 George S. Field, Edmund Hayes, and C. V. N. Kittridge formed the Central Bridge Works—the company which received the contract for the cantilever bridge which spans the Niagara River below the Falls. This same company joined with other bridge manufacturers to construct bridges across the Hudson River and the Mississippi River.

Many other metals firms important to the growth of Buffalo's industrial life were formed during the latter half of the nineteenth century. The Buffalo Wire Works came into existence in 1859 concentrating on the manufacturing of wire cloth. Cast iron radiators were made in Buffalo in 1881 by The Pierce Steam Heating Company, organized by Joseph Bond and John B. Pierce. It was sold in 1892 to the American Radiator Company, with Joseph Bond as president. The Buffalo Gasolene Motor Company, begun in 1899, was a pioneer in the making of motors for boats, trucks, and tractors.

Buffalo was an early center for the automobile industry. Heintz, Pierce, and Maunschauer—which later became the Pierce-Arrow Motor Car Company—was organized in 1872. The company began by mak-

ing bird cages and refrigerators, then added tricycles and bicycles to its line. It changed to car production when the automobile business began to expand throughout the country. When the Pan-American Exposition opened in Buffalo in 1901, the company placed its single-cylinder auto, the *Motorette* on the market. In 1911 the Pierce-Arrow Company introduced the first worm-drive truck and during World War I provided five-ton trucks for the battle front.

Buffalo Pioneers the Coal Industry

The first coal came into the city of Buffalo in 1842 when Guilford R. Wilson decided to move his business from the rolling hills of Elmira, New York to the flat shores of the Queen City. At that time, empty grain ships which were bound for Chicago were happy to transport coal free of charge because it served as ballast. But this arrangement changed when trade increased. Coal became a cargo that had to be paid for like any other freight. Today coal is the largest export item leaving Buffalo Harbor—over a million tons each season.

Spencer Kellogg — First Name in Vegetable Oils

The name Kellogg has been associated with vegetable oils for over a century. Linseed oil was manufactured by Supplina Kellogg in the Mohawk Valley about the middle of the nineteenth century. In 1894 his son, Spencer Kellogg, founded the predecessor of the present company in Buffalo. The company as now known, Spencer Kellogg and Sons, Inc., was formed in 1912. By about this time, the company had plants in Minneapolis, Edgewater and Buffalo and was one of the world's largest producers of linseed oil, and shortly thereafter began to manufacture castor oil and coconut oil.



Buffalo, 1864, from Erie Canal to Niagara River.



Showing Administration Building designed by Frank Lloyd Wright — 1905.

Entering the infant soybean industry in 1934, the company soon became a major processor of soybeans. Today, Spencer Kellogg and Sons, Inc., has plants from coast to coast producing major domestic oilseeds, soy flour, and cattle, poultry, and hog feeds. Their Research Center, on Genesee Street opposite the Greater Buffalo International Airport and the administrative offices for the company are the only establishments now located in Buffalo.

Soap by the Millions of Cakes

The greatest name in soap-making on the Niagara Frontier was that of the Buffalo-located Larkin Company, originators of the *factory-to-family* idea. Retailers and wholesalers, the so-called middlemen, were eliminated. The Larkin products were marketed directly to the consumer.

The Larkin business, founded in 1875, began operations in a small, two-story brick building. It expanded to a factory which occupied 64 acres in 1918. Visitors from all over the world, including the King and Queen of Belgium, came to visit the Larkin soap works.

Elbert G. Hubbard, the *Sage of East Aurora*, became the partner of John D. Larkin who was the firm's founder. It was the wonderful writing talent of Hubbard which aided in selling the Larkin soaps. Later, the company expanded into furniture manufacturing, pure foods, and other items needed in American homes. Today the Larkin Terminal Building is used for other purposes.

Pioneer Spirit Still With Us

The pioneer spirit is still with us. Lawrence Bell, who started the Bell Aircraft Company, not many years ago went from door to door selling stock in his new enterprise. He lectured in school auditoriums to alert the

citizenry on the need for more aircraft production for national defense. Melvin H. Baker, founder of the National Gypsum Company, failed many times before he developed a gypsum board that had the needed qualities that other wallboards lacked. His company today is one of the leaders in the building construction industry.

Depressions and panics, plagues and disasters did not cause the pioneer enterprisers to give up. Businesses were reorganized, new methods adopted, and new "pioneers" carried the torch of free industry a few steps further.

Each year the Buffalo Chamber of Commerce honors the pioneer companies and establishments of Buffalo at a dinner of recognition and acclaim. At the 1959 banquet a list of over 300 firms dating back from 75 to 143 years were honored.

There will always be a need for pioneering and the "pioneer" spirit. It is the youth of today who are preparing for the adventurous deeds of tomorrow.

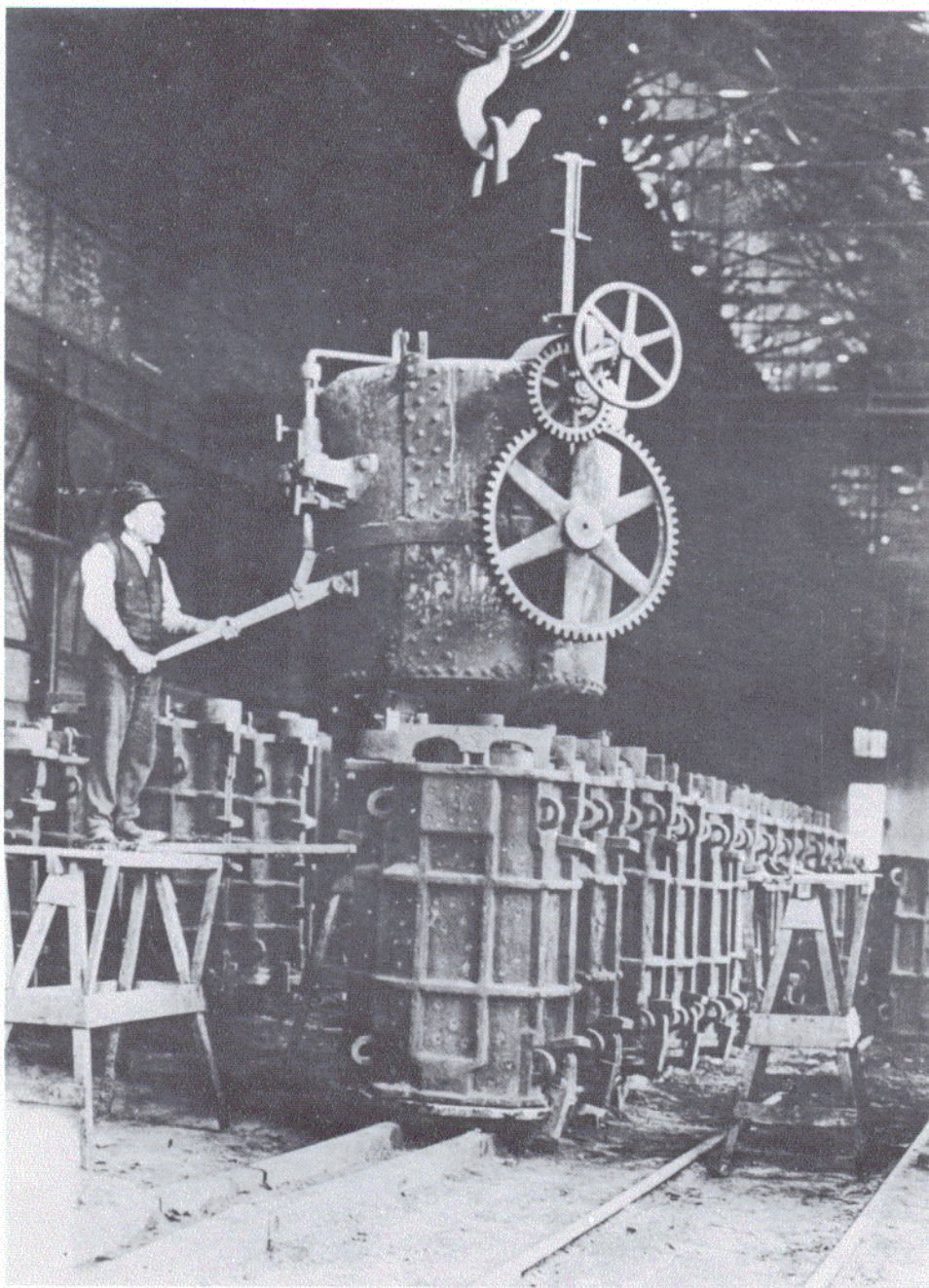
* * *

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Bingham, Robert W. *The Cradle of the Queen City*. Buffalo Historical Society Publications. Vol. 31. Buffalo, 1931.
- Glover, W. H. and Copley, Frank W. "The Birge Story." *Niagara Frontier* 6:1-14. (Spring, 1959).
- Graham, Lloyd and Severance, Frank H. *The First Hundred Years of the Buffalo Chamber of Commerce*. Buffalo, 1954.
- Hatcher, Harlan. "Lake Erie." *The American Lakes Series*. ed. Milo M. Quaife. Indianapolis, 1954.
- Hill, Henry Wayland. *Municipality of Buffalo, New York — A History*. Vol. 2. New York, 1923.
- Horton, John Theodore. *A History of Northwestern New York*. Vol. 1. *Old Erie, the Growth of an American Community*. New York, 1947.
- Lankes, Frank J. "The Hydraulics." *Niagara Frontier* 2:7-9. (Spring, 1955).
- Larned, J. N. *A History of Buffalo*. Vol. 2. New York, 1911.
- McCausland, Walter. "Fares, Please." *Niagara Frontier* 3:93-98. (Winter, 1957).
- Severance, Frank H. ed. *Buffalo Historical Society Publications*. Vol. 17. Buffalo, 1913.
- Smith, H. Perry. *History of the City of Buffalo and Erie County*. Vol. 1, 2. Syracuse, 1884.
- Wilner, Merton M. *Niagara Frontier, A Narrative and Documentary History*. Vol. 1. Chicago, 1931.
- . . . and various company histories in author's private collection.

Editor: Thelma M. Moore.

Editorial Consultant: Donald Lewis Edwards.



Casting Hot Steel into ingots, Lackawanna Plant, 1914. The odd-looking molds were called Leither Barrels.
— Courtesy Bethlehem Steel Company.